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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

242

11 February 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT: Probable International Reactions to Certain
Possible US Courses of Action Against the Castro
Regime

The attached Memorandum for the Director is forwarded
for your information.

Chester L. Cooper
CHESTER L. COOPER
Deputy Assistant Director
National Estimates

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Maxwell Taylor Committee on
Cuba,
28 Jan - 21 May 1961

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Cuba

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

CV-3A3

11 February 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable International Reactions to Certain Possible
US Courses of Action against the Castro Regime

Introduction

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to assess the principal international reactions to various types of action the US might take to bring down the Castro government in Cuba -- especially the nature and magnitude of possible Bloc countermeasures and the possibility of serious adverse reactions on the part of Latin American countries or others in the Free World. The possible actions here considered are: (a) provision of active support, of varying degrees of magnitude and overtness, to an attempt by Cuban opposition elements, internal or in exile, to overthrow Castro; (b) military invasion of Cuba with US forces; or (c) establishment of a naval blockade of Cuba in international waters.

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2. We must emphasize that actual international reactions might be greatly influenced by circumstances which cannot be accurately foreseen -- by the precise nature of the US action; by the manner, speed, and success with which it was carried out; by the extent to which drastic US action might appear to be justified by possible new Cuban provocations; or by possible changes in Cuban relations with other Latin American countries. However, we believe that some valid generalizations can be made on the basis of the situation as it has developed so far and of the nature of the possible US actions considered.

Sino-Soviet Bloc Reactions

3. Bloc leaders from the start have recognized the value of a revolutionary, pro-Communist Cuba as a source of imitation and embarrassment to the US, as an example for revolutionary movements elsewhere in the hemisphere, and as a center for Communist as well as Cuban agitation and propaganda throughout Latin America. The Bloc has provided Castro with extensive political, economic, and military support.

4. Moreover, the Cuban example has assumed increasing prominence in Communist assessments of the world situation. Cuba is being depicted as a prime example of the thesis that colonial

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regimes are inevitably toppling under the impact of revolutionary nationalism, and that Bloc strength can prevent the imperialists from intervening to reverse this process. In the Bloc's view the Castro regime is farther along toward the next stage -- the advent of Communist power -- than any other Free World country. While more recent Soviet pronouncements have tended to minimize specific military commitments to Cuba as well as Khrushchev's implied threat of last summer that Cuba was under the protection of Soviet missiles, the Soviets have if anything reinforced their political alignment with the Castro regime.

5. For these reasons, the Bloc would regard Castro's downfall as a substantial political defeat and would respond vigorously to any major US move -- overt or covert and whether or not supported by others -- to bring it about. Its efforts would probably be directed primarily at heading off the American threat to Cuba by political means, utilizing in the process all opportunities to arouse sympathy for Cuba as a victim of colonialist aggression, and to depict the US action as a threat to the peace. To this end, it would probably stimulate and support mass demonstrations against the US in various countries of Latin America and elsewhere. It would probably demand action by the UN to censure the US and preserve Castro, most likely through

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strong resolutions calling on the US to desist but possibly also through establishment of some sort of UN presence in Cuba. The USSR would firmly oppose any US move to establish a blockade and would use all diplomatic and legal means at its disposal to deny it international acceptance.

6. In the event of a prolonged military struggle between Castro and US-backed opposition forces, the Bloc would almost certainly seek to continue or even to increase its military aid to the Castro regime. However, we believe that the Bloc would avoid a direct military confrontation with US forces. The Communist leaders almost certainly recognize that they have little or no capability to counter US military power in the Cuban area and that US sensitivity regarding Cuba is very great. Certainly they would not wish to risk general war over this issue. Although the Soviets would probably seek to test a US blockade, for

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example, they would almost certainly do so with a merchant vessel, perhaps announcing that it was loaded with foodstuffs and other consumer requirements, rather than with a warship.

7. Even if the US succeeded in bringing Castro down, Blue leaders probably believe that they could offset this defeat to some extent by depicting Castro as a martyr to American imperialism, which took advantage of Cuba's small size and closeness to the US. The Blue leaders would probably also feel themselves impelled to increase pressures elsewhere in order to restore the image of Communist advance. A decision about what to do would depend on many factors, such as the local circumstances at whatever spot was under consideration and their appraisal of the new political situation created by the US action, including any reassessment of US willingness to resist Blue moves elsewhere.

8. Especially if the US action were obvious or acknowledged, Khrushchev would be under pressure, especially from Communist China to give up his present conciliatory line and to shift to a more militant policy. The atmosphere would make it difficult, for a time at least, to hold any US-Soviet discussions looking toward an improvement of relations.

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Latin American Reactions

9. Castro's stature in Latin America has markedly declined over the last year, although he still commands a good deal of sympathy among lower income groups of the area. His dictatorial methods, his political meddling in other countries, and his close collaboration with world communists have progressively alienated many who initially felt that Castro was bringing a long needed social revolution to Cuba. Official opinion, at least privately, has generally crystallized against Castro, and the earlier tendency of many secretly to applaud his Yankee-baiting has subsided. The majority of Latin American governments apparently felt that the US economic embargo was justified and virtually all have at least privately sympathized with the US decision to break diplomatic relations. Peru and five lesser countries -- among them the authoritarian regimes -- have also broken or suspended diplomatic ties with Cuba, and four others have withdrawn their ambassadors from Havana.

10. Most Latin American leaders still are reluctant to take a public stand against Castro for fear of stirring up the vociferous and sometimes strategically placed minority of pro-Communists and other leftists who look to Castro as a symbol of their

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own revolutionary aspirations. Moreover, these leaders themselves continue to be influenced by traditional fears of US domination of the hemisphere. One or two Latin American governments (e.g., Ecuador and perhaps Mexico) are still inclined to work for a negotiated settlement between the US and Castro. The stand of Brazil's new president is uncertain. Thus, we see little likelihood as matters now stand that the OAS can be induced to participate in or officially sanction anti-Castro measures of the drastic nature considered in this memorandum. However, many Latin American leaders probably expect that the US by itself will sooner or later feel compelled to take increasingly strong measures against Castro. Indeed, some sectors of Latin American opinion already criticize the US for not dealing sufficiently forcefully with the Cuban regime.

11. Despite the likelihood of outcries from the far left, most Latin American governments would at least privately approve of unobtrusive US support for an opposition move against Castro which they believed likely to win broad popular support in Cuba. Perhaps a few governments such as those in Venezuela and Colombia would be more inclined to approve if they had been consulted by the US in advance. Some, indeed, would probably be willing to

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provide covert assistance of their own for such a move, particularly if they were assured that the US would participate in efforts to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. This last issue is critical to Venezuelan President Betancourt, whose moderate leftist government is widely respected in the hemisphere. If Betancourt supported new US moves against Castro in return for US commitments regarding Trujillo, a number of other Latin American governments probably would fall in line.

12. Willingness to go along would be greatly weakened if the US role were such as to suggest that the US was imposing a new regime rather than assisting the Cubans themselves to settle their own destinies. Direct participation of US combat forces in overthrowing Castro within Cuba itself would cause a bitter reaction throughout the hemisphere, reflected in strong opposition in the OAS and UN. These reactions would be especially deep and lasting if it appeared that the US was attempting to install another reactionary Batista-type regime in Cuba; in the long run, the reactions would be somewhat mitigated if the new regime appeared clearly to be supported by a representative of the Cuban people.

13. The Latin American reaction would also be adverse if the US established a blockade of Cuba in international waters, though it would probably be less intense than in the case of

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US combat operations within Cuba. At least in the absence of new and persuasive Cuban provocations, most Latin American countries would condemn a blockade unless it were in support of an armed insurrection within Cuba of which they otherwise approved.

Reactions Elsewhere in the Free World

14. The other Free World nations have for the most part not been deeply involved with the Cuban issue. The Western Europeans have preferred to let the US handle Cuba as it sees fit, and the Afro-Asians have taken little note of Cuba, which is far from their sphere of interest. However, drastic US actions (and Soviet counteractions) might create strong opposition by stimulating fears of general war and by creating (especially for the Afro-Asians) an impression of rampant colonialism.

15. The reaction would be minimal in the case of unobtrusive US support for an opposition attempt against Castro. This might produce a good deal of cynicism throughout the world about the US role, but if quickly successful little other lasting reaction. However, an operation in which US participation was marked, or one which resulted in prolonged and inconclusive fighting, would probably generate widespread pressure for moves to internationalize and control the situation.

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16. Actual US military intervention in Cuba would almost certainly evoke widespread vehement political opposition, even if carried out so rapidly as to present the world with a fait accompli. It would remind many people of the Soviet intervention in Hungary. It would provoke a particularly unfavorable response among the Afro-Asian nations, who are, like the Latin Americans, extremely sensitive to what they consider great power disregard for the rights of smaller nations, particularly in colonial or former colonial areas. In some respects the US might be placed in a situation comparable to that of the British and French at the time of Suez, with even many of our NATO allies likely to take the position the US did at that time.

17. Although US imposition of a naval blockade in international waters would probably cause somewhat less international furor than an overt US military invasion of Cuba, there would be widespread receptivity, particularly in the Afro-Asian world, to the likely Castro argument that the US was trying to starve the Cuban people into submission. Since most trade with Cuba is carried on by ships of other nations, moreover, a blockade would pose the question of international acceptance in a particularly

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acute form. Even among these nations otherwise not particularly
sympathetic to Castro, there would probably be widespread resent-
ment at having their own ships halted and denial of the US right
to do so. Although we would not expect military counteraction,
even by the Bloc, there would be great pressure on the US,
diplomatic and legal, to abandon the blockade.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

Robert Smith

ABBOT SMITH
Acting Chairman

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